



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

NOTES AND COMMENT

That there is a design in the bibliographical studies which have appeared in each number of the REVIEW since its beginning is evident to all who have at heart the desire to see the study of American Catholic history raised to a more critical plane.

That purpose has received encouragement from all who have a sincere interest in saving our historiography from being buried under the dead weight of mediocrity and of panegyric so characteristic of its past.

There would be little value to ourselves or to the students who follow us in listing sources upon sources for the study of our Church in this country unless we were free at the same time to judge without fear or favor their intrinsic historical merit: there would also be little advance in discriminating between the negligible and the valuable in Catholic historical works that have already been written unless at the same time our critical appraisal were to serve as a guide and likewise as a warning to those who seek entrance into the difficult field of American Church history.

In carrying out this design, in listing the sources which go to make up a *Biographical Dictionary of the American Hierarchy*, we have been proceeding on the assumption that, as far as our own country is in question, the biographical approach to its Church history is the most natural one the student can take. The personal element in church movements in America is so emphatic that we would fail to understand any period or any diocese adequately if due proportion were not given to biographical studies.

Biography it is which gives to history vitality and concreteness; and in the biographies of our ecclesiastical leaders, we can best find a natural and obvious continuity in the Church history of the past. "Biography when distinctly urged as a bridge to history," writes Johnson, in the *Teaching of History*, p. 171 (New York, 1916), "commonly emphasizes the former." In American history, as in American Church history, biography still proves to be the best introduction. We have but a faint background of tradition to our institutional life, and few phases of our national culture have reached that completion of development which in European countries necessarily subordinates the individual to the group.

Certain questions arise quite naturally from this fact:

What precisely is biography?

In what does it differ from history?

What is the purpose of biography?

What are the principles of historical criticism upon which the biographer should base the choice of his subject and the treatment thereof?

What are the biographer's obligations to truth, to justice, and to charity?

Should everything in the life of the subject be told?

Is suppression of fact in the biographical narrative ever ethical?

Should the life of the ecclesiastic be approached with the same candor and frankness as that of the layman?

Where should ecclesiastical biography branch off from ordinary biography and from hagiography?

Is there not an accepted canon that in the life of the churchman only that which is edifying may be told?

These are questions of theoretical import, it is true; but unless they are answered in all honesty, it will be impossible for the student to find an answer for the more important practical question; namely, *of what value historically are the lives of the members of the American Hierarchy written thus far?* From Brent's *Biographical Sketch of the Most Rev. John Carroll*, published in Baltimore in 1843, down to the late Cardinal Farley's *Life of John Cardinal McCloskey, First Prince of the Church in America*, published in 1918, the number of episcopal biographies has already reached the proportions of a respectable library. If it be true, therefore, that the history of the Catholic Church in the United States is best understood in the lives of its leaders, then the episcopal biographies we possess must be subjected to rigid critical tests before they can be accepted by the historian as materials for his account of Catholicism in America. Certainly no episcopal biography yet written seems to be deserving of a permanent place in American literature. Why is this? Is it because these sketches fall short of the ideals of biographical technique, or is it because of the confusion between history and biography? Or is it because their day has been too near our own?

Biography has always presented a complex problem to the student of literature and of history. All are not agreed upon its definition, though all are agreed that the province of biography is distinct from that of history. In his *English Biography* (London, 1916), Waldo H. Dunn tells us that although it has been generally taken for granted that every one knows what biography is, no one seems to have given us a definition that is adequate. "To say that biography is the history of one man's life, is, at least," he writes, "to be clear and succinct, but the definition is no more than a beginning of the expository process. It is easy enough to say that the history of a man's life constitutes his biography; it is not so easy to declare what should go to make up the history, still less easy to say just what is meant by the life of which the history is to treat. What do we mean when we speak of *the life* of a man? The expression is common, and every one knows, or thinks he knows, what the term means." Edmund Gosse, in his article on *Biography* in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, in considering what biography in its pure sense ought to be, states that we can best reach a standard of evaluation by deciding what biography should not be.

It is not a philosophical treatise nor a polemical pamphlet. It is not even a portion of the human contemporary chronicle. Broad views are entirely out of place in biography, and there is perhaps no greater literary mistake than to attempt what is called the *Life and Times* of a man . . . *History* deals with fragments of the vast roll of events; it must always begin abruptly and close in the middle of affairs; it must always deal impartially with a vast number of persons. *Biography* is a study sharply defined by two definite events—birth and death. It fills its canvas with one figure, and other personages, however great in themselves, must always be subsidiary to the central hero.

We may, then, accept as a provisional definition of biography that it is the story, from birth to death, of one man's life in its external manifestations and in its inward development. But the acceptance of this definition leaves still another—perhaps a more important—problem to be settled: *Whose is the life that deserves the narration thereof?* All who have written on the subject tell us that biography is the result of an overpowering desire in the heart of man to perpetuate the deeds of one of his fellows. In his *Principles of Biography*, England's greatest master in the art, Sidney Lee, holds that "biography exists to satisfy a natural instinct in man—the commemorative instinct—the universal desire to keep alive the memories of those who by character and exploits have distinguished themselves from the mass of mankind" (p. 9). Lee would have us, therefore, write only the *Lives* of those whose *character and exploits* have warranted their tradition to posterity.

This distinction is not very helpful *post factum*, for ecclesiastical *Lives* lie as thick as autumn leaves on ecclesiastical reading tables. It must be confessed that Church history faces a difficulty here; if the test of *character and exploits* were to be rigidly applied to Church leaders, there would be a rather shadowy justification for the numerous ecclesiastical *Lives* written thus far. The problem becomes more complicated when we consider that to allow the biographer to apply his own self-made canon of exclusion to any member of the hierarchy in a given country would rob the Church historian of a later day of much of his best material. If Ciacconius had applied the rule of character and exploits in his *Vitae et res gestae Pontificum Romanorum et S. R. E. Cardinalium ab initio nascentis Ecclesiae usque ad Clementem IX*, his work could not be listed by Pastor in his *History of the Popes* as a source of first value.

On the principle: *qui facit per alium, facit per se*, one would be obliged to admit that at least every bishop should have his biography, since around him and through his *haute direction*, all work of the diocese centers and develops. To respect the memory of a prelate whose episcopate has left its impress, however faint, on the diocese over which he rules, is by most ecclesiastics considered sufficient warrant for writing his biography. The ordinary belief is that as a Governor in the Church, a Chief Shepherd of the Flock, a Husbandman in the Vineyard, an Alter Christus to his priests, the bishop of a diocese has had opportunities of strengthening Catholic life and action within his jurisdiction and

of placing the progress of his diocese abreast of the universal Church. His character may be comparable to the best men of his time; his exploits may be of such a kind that the nation itself feels that he is as large a factor in national progress as in church affairs. On the other hand, his character and his exploits may be the opposite. His life may have been spent, *in dir Stille*, in building up the broken walls of a diocese, the shattered bonds of unity among his people, the weakened spirit of concord with those of other faiths. But the question whether he should have the narrative of his labors written for posterity cannot be judged by the same rule as one applies to men in the world. In reality, owing to the close dependence of American Church history upon biographical narrative, each diocese should have an accurate, complete, and official biographical series of the bishops who have ruled it in the past.

Passing to the question of biographical technique, what should be said about the rule so strongly emphasized by the editors of the *Dictionary of National Biography*: namely, biographical independence of ethics, history, and science? Should ecclesiastical biography be autonomous in design and in treatment? "Biography," Lee writes, "must resolutely preserve its independence of three imposing themes of study, which are often seen to compete for its control. True biography is no handmaid of ethical instruction. Its purpose is not that of history. It does not serve biological or anthropological science. Any assistance that biography renders these three great interests—ethical, historical and scientific—should be accidental; such aid is neither essential nor obligatory. Biography rules a domain of its own; it is autonomous" (*Principles of Biography* p. 6). The ecclesiastical biographer can scarcely accept exclusion from the field of ethics and of history. The student of Church History welcomed the day when what is called genetic history or history based upon the scientific method of modern criticism began to dawn; but he realizes also that the process of systematic arrangement and examination of facts of history does not constitute a satisfying ideal. Whether or no modern criticism welcome the truth that man instinctively desires to learn lessons for the present from the past, that truth is too evident for denial. To adapt a passage from Devas' *Key to the World's Progress*: can we not suffer the biographer, cleric or lay, without this prejudgment of the moral value of his subject, to pursue his narrative in peace and to allow the facts to speak for themselves? But facts themselves are dumb, and a biographer is no purveyor of an indiscriminate collection of facts; he is no scientific chronicler, but precisely one whose narrative is the fruit of a process of reasoning. For out of the vast mass of recorded facts, oftentimes a confused and unintelligent heap, he must select what is pertinent, relevant, important, and characteristic. No gazing at facts will provide the biographer with what may be called a theoretical anticipation of the lesson his Life will produce upon the reader. Before he enters the labyrinth of a man's life, he must have a lamp to guide him.

That lamp should be lighted by the steady flame of edification. This must be admitted at the outset; unless the ecclesiastical biographer accept this *apriori*

standard, his work will be useless. That he will, thereby, cut himself off from his fellows in the field of critical history does not always follow, for everything will depend upon his treatment of his subject. There are two problems in the manner of edification—*how much can be told and how should it be told*. The Church has always been jealous of panegyric, and no biography of an ecclesiastic will receive her *Imprimatur* unless the author preface his work with the now familiar disavowal:

It only remains to submit all that is here written to the judgment of the Church, and to declare in conformity with the decrees of Urban VIII, and of other Popes, that only human authority is here ascribed to the facts related and to the appellations indicating sanctity used in regard to the subject, etc.

How much can be told? Platzhoff in his *Theorie der Biographie* says rather succinctly: "Das Ideal des Biographen sei jene heitere Weise . . . der Gutes sieht, wo er kann, Böses, wo er muss, der als Mensch von Menschen zu Menschen redet." The classic example of *suppression* in modern Catholic biography is that which occurred in the publication of Purcell's *Manning*. An equally classic example of *inclusion* is Snead-Cox's *Life of Cardinal Vaughan*. The biographer saw his difficulty and met it nobly:

Then the question came: Was it right to put out in print the private outpourings of these intimate and spiritual diaries? It may be said at once there are things given in these volumes which I know the Cardinal, in his life-time, would—well, have cut off his hand rather than allow to be published. But ought that certainty to have been decisive against publication now? Or, rather, should not the question shape itself in this fashion—Would Cardinal Vaughan now wish withheld from the world anything he had done, or thought, or suffered, the knowledge of which could make for good, or serve for a help, or an example, or an inspiration, to anyone? That question seemed to me to answer itself.

Snead-Cox could add in all truthfulness: "If I have not been candid, I am without excuse"; on the same principle Baronius states in his *Annales*: *Nihil veritas erubescit, nisi solummodo abscondi!*

The problem of truthfulness is undoubtedly not to be solved apart from that of opportuneness. Frederick Denison Maurice had said somewhere that no man's life ought to be published till twenty years after his death. Time softens many things, if not all, in human life, and its passage brings a better and clearer perspective. "A contemporary can never judge as the historian a hundred years after the fact judges, but the contemporary view has also its place, and it may be really nearer to the living truth than is the conclusion formed when the past is cold and remote and the actors are dead long ago" (Thayer, *Theodore Roosevelt*, p. xi, New York, 1920).

Manning had a horror of seeing his own *Life* in print before his death. "To write my life, while I am still alive," he said, "is like putting me into my coffin before I am dead." How long an interested public should wait is a much debated question; but certainly it must be admitted that once the biographer begins his work, he should be dominated by the determination to tell the truth.

Not that he needs to enter the sacred tabernacle of a man's heart, as the jaunty Purcell has done, with an irresponsible wish to suppress nothing, as he tells us in the *Life of Manning* (Vol. i, p. vii). Discrimination is as much a part of truth-telling as truth itself, for it is always more easy to deal with the dead and buried past than with the events and actors of our own days. Some *Lives* should be left to the care of posterity, which can see them with clearer eyes and judge them more fairly. The sanctities of life are not to be violated, the living are not to be wounded, the dead are not to be wronged—in the interests of truth, for truth in that case becomes selfish and domineering.

Faber says somewhere in his letters that every man has many biographies running in parallel lines in his life. To tell the story of the whole man requires a profound appreciation of the task in hand and a religious respect for the dead. We have indeed departed from the biographical canon laid down by Wordsworth that we should shield a man by shrinking from the truth:

Silence is a privilege of the grave, a right to the departed; let him, therefore, who infringes that right, by speaking publicly of, for, or against, those who cannot speak for themselves, take heed that he opens not his mouth without a sufficient sanction. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*, is a rule in which these sentiments have been pushed to an extreme that proves how deeply humanity is interested in maintaining them.

But once begun—once this sufficient sanction is present—the biographer must reveal to us the man himself—the whole man. This Capecelatro holds to be the chief defect of the earlier ecclesiastical biographers, in that they are wanting in the proper order of development and in historical description of the whole inner life of their subjects (*Life of St. Philip Neri*, Vol. i, p. xiii). In a little known treatise on historical method, the Preface to the *Acta Sanctorum* (t. i, p. xxxii), the rule of biographical candidness is given as follows: *Profiteor me quae de Sanctis tradita litteris repererim dare, nihil assuere, nihil mutare, nihil meopse ingenio emendare, nihil praecidere, integra omnia et inviolata afferre, quoad possum.*

We have a right indeed to expect that the ecclesiastical biographer will give us—by a judicious choice and detail of particular actions and episodes in the life of his subject—a living image of his hero. The truth must not be deformed to meet the unreasonable wish of those who hold it in fear. At best, life presents a tangled skein, good and ill juxtaposed, and a truthful picture of a life lived *in dem Strom der Welt* can alone satisfy the canons of modern historical criticism. To bury our subject under a load of platitudes is part of that idealized biography which has long since passed out. We desiderate a living image of the subject, walking, talking, breathing, sighing, weeping, laughing, as was his wont in life. “Se l’Evangelista non ha celato il peccato e la caduta del Guida”—Purcell quotes this rather gleefully as one of Leo XIII’s statements to Manning—“perché dobbiamo noi celare il peccato di vescovi ed altri personaggi?” (Vol. ii, p. 755).

The biographer's work falls into two departments, we are told by Wilfrid Ward, the biographer of four eminent Englishmen—his own father, Cardinal Wiseman, Aubrey de Vere, and Cardinal Newman. In his *Last Lectures* (New York, 1918), the distinguished essayist enters into the problem of the *Nature and Limits of Character Study*, and emphasizes the fact that the biographer must first study *all available material* in order to make his own idea of his subject quite complete. He must then attempt as an artist to present the picture which has been formed in his own mind from the whole material, by choosing for publication a *convincing selection* from that material. "This," he says, "is the only true method of biography . . . the biographer must study all and use at his discretion whatever serves best for a convincing picture. That must be his sole principle in selection" (p. 158). Mr. Ward defines the principal kinds of material at the disposal of the biographer as: (1) Letters, (2) recorded conversation, (3) diaries and autobiographies, (4) the reminiscences of friends, (5) incidental self-revelations in works already published (p. 175).

Wilfrid Ward's brief article, *Candour in Biography*, begins with the admission that "the careful student who wishes to form an accurate judgment of a given character should see the whole available evidence. The suppression of the 'astute' or the 'timid' are so far prejudicial to perfect truth and accuracy. I go a step further, and do not care to dispute that, apart from letters unintelligible or misleading, without explanation of their circumstances, the public may, in the long run, form the truer impression of a man from a very liberal publication of his letters."
